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SUBJECT: PAKISTANI, AFGHAN, AND IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTERS  
HOLD TRILATERAL MEETING, ISSUE DECLARATION ON COOPERATION

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi hosted his Afghan and Iranian counterparts for a meeting in Islamabad on January 16. This was the third high-level gathering of the three countries in the past year -- which included a trilateral heads-of-state summit in May 2009 in Tehran. The foreign ministers issued a joint declaration that outlined aspirations for future trilateral cooperation. The sides agreed to upcoming meetings of their finance and commerce ministers, interior ministers, and security and intelligence chiefs, in preparation for a second trilateral summit. The Afghan Embassy told us that trilateral cooperation will principally be focused in three areas -- economics and trade, counter-narcotics, and counter-terrorism -- but indicated that the whole initiative remains in a nascent stage. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi hosted Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta and Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki for a trilateral ministerial meeting in Islamabad on January 16. This was the third high-level gathering of the three countries since Presidents Zardari, Karzai, and Ahmadinejad agreed at the March 2009 Economic Cooperation Organization summit (ECO) to meet in a trilateral format. The first trilateral meeting, held in April 2009 in Kabul, brought the countries' foreign ministers together to prepare for a trilateral heads-of-state summit. The second trilateral event was the summit itself, which took place in Tehran on May 24, 2009.

¶3. (U) Qureshi, Spanta, and Mottaki issued a joint declaration following their January 16 meeting that stated that the three sides "strongly believe that their trilateral cooperation is the key to regional peace" and expressed the countries' intent to strengthen such cooperation. According to the declaration, the sides agreed to enhance their national counter-terrorism efforts through trilateral intelligence sharing and greater operational cooperation, and to increase their cooperation combating narco-trafficking and other transnational crimes. The declaration also reaffirmed the three countries' commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction, and outlined aspirations for greater economic cooperation, including by establishing trilateral economic and industrial commissions and by launching a feasibility study on a joint investment fund. To implement the trilateral cooperation initiative, the three countries agreed in the declaration to establish a coordinating committee

headed by their deputy foreign ministers, and to hold separate trilateral meetings of their finance and commerce ministers, interior ministers, and security and intelligence chiefs, all in preparation for a second trilateral summit, which will be held in Islamabad on a yet-unspecified date.

¶4. (U) Speaking to the media following the January 16 meeting, Foreign Minister Qureshi said that Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan are the three most important neighbors in achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. He described the joint declaration as a "roadmap for future trilateral interaction."

¶5. (C) During a January 25 meeting with Deputy PolCouns, Afghan Embassy First Secretary Izharulhaq Ahady said that the impetus for the trilateral cooperation initiative came from Ahmadinejad at the ECO summit. Ahady explained that the initiative is focused in three principal areas -- economics and trade, counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism. However, he indicated that trilateral cooperation remains in a nascent stage, with the details to be worked out in subsequent high-level meetings. According to Ahady, the planned meetings of the countries' finance and commerce ministers, interior ministers, and security and intelligence chiefs will develop modalities for future cooperation that will be discussed at the follow-on leaders' summit. Deputy PolCouns noted that in the January 16 joint declaration, the countries agreed "to enhance regional connectivity through establishment and development of energy and transport corridors," and asked Ahady whether the foreign ministers had discussed pipelines during their meeting. Ahady responded

ISLAMABAD 00000190 002 OF 002

that the issue had not come up, and pointed out that there are no pipeline proposals that would involve all three countries.

¶6. (C) Though the joint declaration stated that the sides would set up a coordinating body headed by deputy foreign ministers, Ahady said he believed that coordination would actually take place through lower-level channels. He stressed that the initiative was not aimed against any other country and would not impinge upon the three countries' obligations toward other countries or other international groupings.

¶7. (C) Comment: Despite three high-level meetings in less than a year, the three countries do not appear to have thus far made much headway on substantive trilateral cooperation. The January 16 joint declaration is principally an agreement to hold more high-level meetings and set up bodies that could ultimately lead to actual cooperation. However, given long-standing mutual suspicions among the three sides, and the difficulties we have encountered in promoting bilateral Pak-Afghan cooperation, we anticipate that trilateral cooperation will proceed quite slowly. That said, one key benefit of this initiative for Pakistan is that it is a multilateral forum for working with the Afghans that excludes the Indians, whose influence and activities in Afghanistan the Pakistanis consider inimical to their own national security interests.  
PATTERSON